

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

The Image of the Public Service Today  
And How It Can Be Improved

A term paper prepared to partially  
fulfill the requirements of  
PAD 231  
Public Personnel Administration  
for  
Doctor Waldo Sommers

Kurt N. Molholm  
July 15, 1974

19960701 051

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A

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17 July 1974

Dear Kurt;

Your paper was well written, with an interesting  
Bibliography, and your grade is A.

Thank you for your care with the typography.

WS  
Waldo Sommers

*A per Gretchen Schdag*

A

EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION, 17 JULY 1974

DIRECTIONS: Answer all THREE questions in Group I, and ONE question in Group II. Total questions to be answered: FOUR. All questions have equal weight. READ the questions CAREFULLY and answer as completely as time permits. Interpretation of the questions and clear communication of your answers are part of the examination. Write legibly. Time allowed: two hours.

Group I. Answer ALL THREE questions in this Group;

1. Explain any two of the following and show the relationship of each to public personnel administration in general;

- a. Puritan Ethic.
- b. Lloyd-LaFollette Act.
- c. Shift from "civil service" administration to "personnel" administration.

2. Point out the significance of common elements in these emerging dilemmas, and their relationship to public personnel administration; police confronted with racial turmoil; Army officers fighting a war they are not allowed to win; highway engineers seeing their products result in greater congestion.

3. Briefly summarize the strategy and tactics of the United States Civil Service Commission in its relationships with the main units and forces involved in the personnel policy-making process. In this connection, discuss some of the findings and recommendations of the Public Interest Research Group and the Commission's response to them.

Group II. Answer ONE question in this Group;

4. How does one square a permanent civil service, which neither the people by their vote nor their representatives by their appointments can replace, with the principle of "government by the people"?

5. Write a brief essay on the use of study commissions and committees, calling attention to specific proposals and contributions by such bodies to public personnel administration.

6. Attack or defend the assertion that placement systems centering on rank in the person and those centering on rank in the job are now similar.

FAIR DAYS  
WORK FOR  
DAYS DAY

DISMISSAL FOR CAUSE  
UNLAWFUL  
NO STRIKE

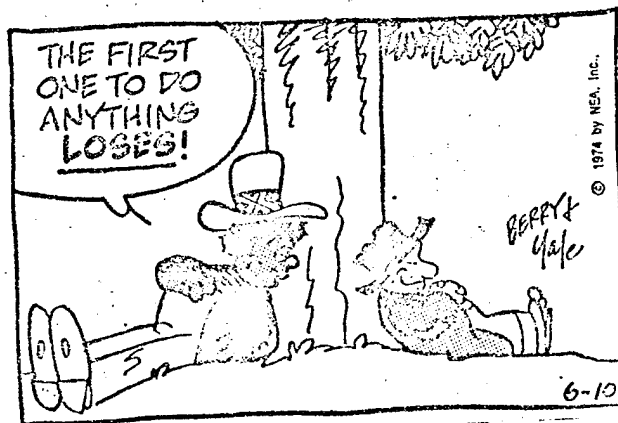
Accumulate  
discipline  
Correct  
Root Cause  
Class  
to solve  
my them

improves  
public opinion  
cooperation with  
cooperation with Congress

appeals, grievances

Conceal  
a  
Cautious

BENJY



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## CHAPTER I

### BACKGROUND

As the title of the paper implies the today's image of the Public Service is not good. In a survey conducted last fall by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan, the Federal Government, as a whole, ranked next to the bottom in the public's rating of U.S. Institutions. The survey asked how good a job each of 15 public institutions was doing for the country. The results showed, with the exception of the military, which ranked on the top, that almost all other governmental institutions ranked near the bottom. As could be expected, the President and his administration, with the problems of Watergate and inflation, ranked on the bottom.<sup>2</sup>

It can be assumed that one reason the Federal Government ranked next to the bottom was because of the President's problems. Although the merit system of the U.S. Civil Service System is a relatively effective method of separation of politics from government administration it is only natural that problems of the executive would impact the public image of the entire Executive Branch. Presidential problems, however, are not the only reason for the public's relatively low regard for the public service.

As the Berry and Yale cartoon which prefaces this paper shows, bureaucracy is displayed in a negative way. Over 150 years ago, the French Novelist Balzac wrote "Bureaucracy is a giant mechanism operated by Pygmies."<sup>3</sup> More recently Alvin Toffler in his book Future Shock wrote that "... Bureaucracies are well suited to tasks that require masses of moderately educated men to perform routine operations ...."<sup>4</sup>

While bureaucracies exist, as Toffler points out, as corporations, universities or governmental agencies<sup>5</sup> they are normally associated with government. Thus, the image of Public Service, associated as it is with bureaucracy and bureaucrats, suffers from a stereotype of a mass of clerks<sup>6</sup> and of officials who work "by fixed routine without exercising intelligent judgment."<sup>7</sup>

The Brookings study disclosed that the characteristics attributed to the civil servant by the general employed public are good personal character, capability for doing the work because of training and ability, being a good worker, and having an agreeable personality. However, references to these favorable qualities decline among the more elite groups. These groups describe the civil servant as security conscious, lacking in ambition, adaptable to routine, a poor worker, and non-creative and dull.<sup>8</sup> The stereotype held by the more elite groups are important because this group has more influence on the institutions and individuals which mold public opinion than does the general public.

Like all generalizations, examples can be found which support the negative stereotypes. However, the negative stereotypes, by and

large, are not true. The task of managing the affairs of the Federal Government is an enormous one, one that is beyond comprehension of most people. The Federal Government owns more than one-third of the total land area of this country, has erected over 400,000 buildings,<sup>9</sup> and also owns installations and facilities such as utility systems, power development and distribution systems, railroads, roads and bridges, communication systems, reclamation and flood control facilities, and harbor and port facilities. Management of this massive undertaking could not be accomplished by people fitting the stereotype held by the public.

Just as Balzac's observation, while possibly valid at the time it was made, is outmoded so is the image of the civil service as "an Army of Clerks." Occupations in the government match almost every kind outside the government and include a number not found in the private sector.<sup>10</sup> The Federal service of today, while it still includes tasks well suited to Tofflers "masses of moderately educated men to perform routine operations," is largely a corps of professional men and women, and of highly skilled technicians. Ironically, career civil servants have been pioneers in implementing computer application to replace the masses doing routine operations and, contrary to popular opinion "there has been an amazing increase in government efficiency over the years."<sup>11</sup>

It is the purpose of this paper to explore some of the reasons why the poor image of the public service, and specifically of the



Federal Government, exists and to suggest possible ways to change it. The research for this paper included a literature search, personal interviews, and my own 15 years experience as a Federal employee.

## CHAPTER II

### WHY THE IMAGE EXISTS

The Federal Establishment is so big and so pervasive that it has significant influence throughout the country and the world. Its functions penetrate all aspects of our domestic society and decisions made have strong, often decisive, impact on matters such as the amount and kind of scientific research and technology development and in patterns of employment. As such it is constantly visible to the general public. As a result, four-fifths or more of the respondents to the Brookings Study were willing to generalize about federal civil servants.<sup>12</sup> As a comparison, the study revealed that the percentage willing to stereotype employees in a large private business was smaller.<sup>13</sup> Thus, an attempt to change the image of the public service must recognize an ingrained opinion exists in a vast number of people.

The problem is made more difficult because the negative image of the federal worker is more prevalent in the higher-level (i.e., higher educated, higher paid, higher in organizational structure, etc.) than in the lower-level.<sup>14</sup> It is even further compounded by the federal worker, himself. Federal employees are more favorable

than the comparable non-federal groups in their comments on the civil servant; but except for the federal executive, the upper-level federal groups hold a less favorable image of themselves than do those lower in the hierarchy.<sup>15</sup>

The self-image of the federal worker is an indicator of one of the reasons why the bureaucrat is not held in high esteem. Research suggests that over-complexity of organizational structure is one of the most important and fundamental causes of poor management-employee relationships.<sup>16</sup> Combining over-complexity of structure with the "Theory X" philosophy defined by Douglas McGregor which normally exists in the federal bureaucracies, it is reasonable to expect that a significant portion of the federal work force does not have as much job satisfaction as is desirable.

This is extended even more because Civil Service Commissions classification standards, while more flexible than in the past, encourage supervisors to attempt to justify additional people or missions in order to gain a promotion for themselves. By and large, there is no incentive for people (other than a moral incentive) to economize in the way they do business. In some cases, people are demoted if the number of personnel they supervise is greatly reduced even though the size of the mission is not diminished. These internal problems ultimately manifest themselves as further support for a negative image of a bureaucracy.

Negative stereotypes are also reinforced by the federal employee being highly visible. Accountability can be escaped by elected officials by blaming the "bureaucrats." The "bureaucrat" can also be used by an administration which, not caring for the policies of a previous administration, can blame him for shortcomings, real or perceived, of the previous administration."<sup>17</sup>

The use of the federal bureaucracy as a scapegoat is not limited to the politician. Because of its size and its cost to the taxpayer, the Federal Establishment is recipient of the demagoguery of vested interests, for example the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Tax Foundation, and the Tax Protest of America. Conservatives such as the broadcaster, Paul Harvey, continue to use the technique of the demagogue to attack the bureaucracy. One result is a further lowering of the image of the civil servant. For example, Mr. Harvey, in his June 28, 1974 broadcast expounded on the virtues of the management of the oil industry and the ineptness of the Government's management. His example was that over a 10 year period the cost of petroleum products had risen only 73 percent while the cost of mailing a postcard had risen 700 percent, from 1 cent to 8 cents. What is always left unsaid is that the civil servant is normally not the cause but instead, is merely the administrator of programs enacted by Congress or implemented by the President, both ostensibly reacting to the will of the people. Also left unsaid is the fact that the civil servant is also a taxpayer and is as concerned about the rise of taxes as anyone else.

A discussion of why the image of the civil servant is poor cannot be complete without mentioning "Government Red Tape." Government, because of its size, its bureaucratic compartmentalization, its need for control, and its history of checks and balances, requires a mass of data. In spite of efforts to streamline its data requirements, Government still requires data that the citizen (and sometimes even the government worker receiving it) believes unnecessary. The result is the image of an "army of clerks" and governmental dehumanization of the citizenry. Both results are negative factors influencing the image of the Public Service.

## CHAPTER III

### WHAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE THE IMAGE

Because of its size, visibility and general susceptibility to demagoguery there is no way to eradicate the poor image of the Public Service. There are, however, ways to mitigate it both by internal changes and by improved public relations.

#### Streamlining

Bureaucracy as a pervasive element in the image of the Federal Government (and in most other governmental units) is inescapable. The larger the organization, the greater the need for standard procedures, formal communications, and record keeping. Additionally, the U.S. governmental system splits power among 3 branches of government and, although desirable, this system encourages complexity, elaborate base touching, caution and delay. All of these things together mean that nearly everyone, both general citizenry and government worker, finds himself, on occasion, dealing against his wishes with an impersonal, complex, cumbersome, unreasonable, and powerful force. When such an occasion arises, it naturally reinforces the negative bureaucratic image. It is important, therefore, that government policy-makers,

administrators, and general employees constantly strive to find means of personalizing, simplifying, clarifying, speeding-up, and coordinating governmental operations.

There, of course, is no complete cure but the following illustrates some of the possible actions that can be taken to improve the bureaucracy:

1. Organizational Change. Currently the Social Security Administration is implementing a system of management that, by the end of the year, will encompass nearly a fifth of its workforce. The system breaks down the traditional layering of a bureaucracy and institutes a "modular" organization.

Basically, a module tries to foster group consciousness among workers. Traditional bureaucracies work in segregated layers, with each layer identified by its particular function. The modular concept takes representatives from the functional areas, mixes the skills, and puts them together. In the Social Security Administration modules, employees work together at close quarters in large rooms, each employee being able to assume the work of another when called to do so.

Supervisors, file clerks, secretaries, professionals -- all the managerial and clerical disciplines required for the functions -- occupy desks within earshot of each other so that written communications are all but eliminated.<sup>18</sup>

The Social Service Administrations concept is similar to the Project Manager concept which has seen such great success in the past few years, both within and without the government. These transient teams, brought together to solve a specific problem and then separate, are the forerunners of what Toffler views as the future, what he calls the move from bureaucracy to "ad-hocracy" (i.e., tasks groups and other ad hoc groups).<sup>19</sup>

The need for a revitalization of organizational concepts is well stated by John Gardner who says "Most organizations have a structure that was designed to solve problems that no longer exist."<sup>20</sup> The "self-renewing" organization, he defines as one that constantly changes its structure in response to changing needs.<sup>21</sup> It is recognized that because of statutes and because of differing functions and needs, not all federal organizations can be revamped. Where possible, however, organizational concepts should be modernized.

2. Rotation of Personnel. Although the Federal Government does have a personnel exchange program which attempts to rotate its personnel between departments, between headquarters and field activities, and between government and industry, it should be expanded. Personnel rotation should also be made a significant consideration for promotion. I do not advocate extensive "job hopping" but I also do not believe that a person can expand his horizons without extensive contact with the views of industry, other agencies, and either field activities or



headquarters (depending where he is). Few jobs offer this exposure. Such exposure can only be obtained through a change in job. The Federal Government should offer an incentive for such a change.

3. Elimination of Outdated Legislation. The Brookings Study suggested that most, if not all, committees of Congress should have a "Subcommittee on Past Legislation" comprised of the chairman of all other subcommittees. This committee should have as its function the ferreting out of existing legislation which is no longer necessary and the recodification of existing law to improve clarity and ease of compliance.<sup>22</sup> This recommendation, made in 1963, is still valid. In addition to these subcommittees, a commission should be established to study the various regulatory agencies and to recommend, if appropriate, elimination or combination of the federal regulatory agencies. Streamlining of the regulatory functions of government would not only save tax dollars and reduce the size of government but it would also return a part of the market back to a price competitive market.

#### A New Personnel Philosophy

Changes in organization, like those suggested above, would not only assist in streamlining government operations but would also improve employee morale. However, organizational change is not all that is required.

The Brookings studies indicate that "occupational values display a consistent hierarchial, or step like patterning ...<sup>23</sup> by

education, income and occupation. The study shows that the lower the level, the more simple are the occupational concerns. Conversely, the higher the level, the higher is the desire of a personal involvement with work and there is greater emphasis on abstract, long-term ego-rewarding and intrinsic values. The point is that "differential demands call for differential responses."<sup>24</sup>

The Brookings' study further concludes that "federal employment is not adequately suited to the occupational values of personnel at the upper educational and occupational levels."<sup>25</sup> Because it is the upper levels that must provide the impetus for much of the streamlining suggested earlier, it is obvious that there must be highly motivated individuals at these levels of the career federal service.

A great many of the negative elements and problems of upper-level federal employee morale have roots in the apparent federal personnel philosophy against inequity. While the federal policy should demand that there be no departure from equality of opportunity, there is no need for sameness of treatment. What is needed is an approach which permits employees or groups of employees the kind of special, differential treatment both uniquely suited to their needs and uniquely designed to enhance their quality, creativity, productivity, and individual sense of worth.

#### Information and Education

The need for a strong, well-planned program of information for education of both the public and of elected and appointed government policy-maker is needed. The need is underlined by the many

positive values actually present in civil service not being communicated adequately, particularly to the upper levels. The image of the Civil Service and of the individual civil servant lack differentiation and are strongly tied to a perception of mediocrity and limited appeal.

It is this writer's observation that the primary source for positive public information about the civil servant are the various government worker unions. The union is the most active and often the only advocate of the civil servant and it is the union that replies to the National Chamber of Commerce, the Tax Foundation, or other organizations which periodically issue anti-Civil Service diatribes. The problem with the union as the public advocate of the civil servant is that it also suffers from many of the same negatives regarding its image that the Civil Service suffers from. As an example, the unions also rate low in the public's view of public institutions.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the public is less likely to react favorably to its efforts. The union also suffers from its orientation toward improved pay and benefits. It is therefore not adequately adapted to discuss motivational needs of the government employee. Thus, the union, like the government, equates equality with sameness -- at the expense of individual motivational needs. However, in spite of a limited budget for public relations, the union is one of the few positive forces trying to influence the public's image of the Civil Service.

The Civil Service Commission also has a role in improving the image, particularly the image of the career federal worker. The CSC's role is susceptible, however, to Presidential influence and to Congressional budget cutting. If the President is part of the influencing power which is solidifying the negative image, it is unlikely that the Civil Service Commission will publicly refute him. If the Congress is looking for a place to cut the budget without making waves, it can do so by cutting public relations dollars from the Federal Departments and Agencies. One result of these two factors is that the role of the Civil Service Commissions Office of Public Affairs appears to be primarily that of promoting the desirability of federal employment.

The public information and education efforts of both the Civil Service Commission and the Unions are hampered by a lack of funding. It is to be expected that these organizations select to promote the areas which will benefit most their immediate goals and objectives. It is this writer's opinion, however, that greater long term benefits would be derived if an effort was made to educate the senior policy-makers in their responsibilities as managers of the Federal bureaucracy. The President, his appointed officials and the members of Congress, although they seldom act the role, have a responsibility to the federal employee and his image much like the President, the Chairman of the Board, and the Board of Directors of IBM have to the employees of IBM and their image.

The elected and senior appointed officials of the government have great influences on public opinion. Yet seldom do they take the responsibility of management to promote the positive image of the civil servant or, more importantly, to defend the civil servant against unwarranted attacks. In industry the opposite happens. The faith of the public in IBM depends on a positive image of the IBM employee. IBM spends a considerable portion of its advertising budget to promote a positive image of its worker and it would be most unusual for the President of IBM to publicly degrade the IBM work force. Such is not the case of the American President or her Congressmen.

Thus an orientation is required to enlighten the President, the members of Congress and all the Senior Managers of the Government in their responsibilities to their employees.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

Americans rightly find a great deal wrong with their government. They have difficulties with the bureaucracy, problems with their veteran benefits and issues over their income tax. They have concerns over apparent waste, and have hassles with this agency or that agency over excessive "red tape." There are thousands of examples where government is insensitive to citizen's problems and slow to move and, while all of these instances can never be eliminated they can be reduced in number and in complexity.

The image of the public servant is not good. The reasons for this poor image by and large, are not of his own making and, therefore, the public servant needs help in improving his image. There is no way to eliminate the bad image but at least actions can be taken to mitigate it. What is needed is a streamlining of government to permit the civil servant to use his initiative; a change in personnel philosophy to encourage the civil servant to use his initiative; and a change in the attitude of the elected and appointed officials to help the civil servant to use his initiative.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Berry & Yale, "Benjy," Washington Star News, June 10, 1974, back page.

<sup>2</sup>William Chapman, "Military Most Admired U.S. Institution," The Washington Post, May 4, 1974, p. A1.

<sup>3</sup>Honore de Balzac, from Barteletts Unfamiliar Quotation, 1971, p. 31.

<sup>4</sup>Alvin Toffler, Future Shock, New York: Bantam Books, August 1971, p. 141.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>6</sup>Franklin P. Kilpatrick, Milton C. Cummings, Jr., M. Kent Jennings, The Image of the Federal Service, Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1963, p. 241.

<sup>7</sup>The American College Dictionary, C.L. Barnhart, Editor in Chief, New York: Random House, 1970, p. 160.

<sup>8</sup>Kilpatrick, Cummings, & Jennings, The Image of the Federal Service, p. 240.

<sup>9</sup>U.S. Civil Service Commission, "The Federal Career Service - At Your Service," U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>11</sup>William Proxmire, Excerpts from a speech, quoted in The Government Standard, July 1974, p. UM-1.

<sup>12</sup>Kilpatrick, Cummings, and Jennings, The Image of the Federal Service, p. 239.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 239-240.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>16</sup>James C. Worthy, "Organizational Structure and Employee Morale," American Sociological Review, Vol 15, April 1950, p. 177.

<sup>17</sup>Personal interview with Mr. Gregg Kenefick, American Federation of Government Employees, National Headquarters, June 24, 1974.

<sup>18</sup>Indeyit Badhwar, "Revolutionary Work System," Federal Times, X, No. 16, June 26, 1974, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup>Toffler, Future Shock, p. 136.

<sup>20</sup>John Gardner, Self-Renewal, Evanston, Illinois: Harper & Company, 1963, p. 26.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Kilpatrick, Cummings, and Jennings, The Image of the Federal Service, p. 257.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Chapman, "Military Most Admired U.S. Institution," p. A1



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